

# The Initial GP Appointment

## A guide for parents who think their child or teen may have an eating disorder

If your child or teenager is experiencing symptoms of an eating disorder, a visit to their GP is an important first step. This handout will help you understand what to expect from and how to advocate for the best possible care.



### What is the GP's role?

The GP plays a key role in:

- Assessing your child's physical health and risk level
- Initiating referrals to specialist services
- Coordinating ongoing medical monitoring
- Supporting access to evidence-based treatment

Early identification and intervention are vital for recovery.



### What should the assessment involve?

According to best-practice guidelines, a thorough first appointment should include:

#### 1. Medical Assessment

- Weight and height
- Vital signs: Heart rate, blood pressure (lying and standing - this is important and sometimes gets missed), temperature
- Physical examination (including signs of malnutrition such as dry skin, fine hair, or delayed reflexes)
- Menstrual history (if applicable)

#### 2. Mental Health Screening

- Discussion of eating patterns, exercise behaviours, and body image concerns
- Assessment of mood, anxiety, self-harm or suicidal thoughts
- Screening for co-occurring conditions (e.g., depression, anxiety, OCD)

#### 3. Blood Tests and Investigations

Your GP should order baseline investigations, such as:

- Full blood count (FBC)
- Electrolytes, urea, and creatinine
- Liver function tests
- Thyroid function
- Magnesium, phosphate, calcium
- ECG if pulse is low, irregular, or under 50 beats per minute

These tests help identify medical complications that may not be obvious.

Your GP may make a formal diagnosis themselves, or they may request that the clinician to whom they refer you do so instead.

**Tell the doctor straight away if your child:**

- Is losing weight rapidly
- Has expressed thoughts of self-harm or suicide

**If you are aware that your child has any of the following symptoms, go straight to a hospital emergency department**

- Fainting, collapsing, or feeling dizzy when standing
- You are aware they have a heart rate under 50 bpm or very low blood pressure
- Has completely stopped eating or drinking

These are signs that urgent medical or hospital care may be needed.



## What happens next?

If an eating disorder is suspected or confirmed, your GP will make a referral to services who can provide evidence-based treatment for your child or teenager.

Eating Disorders can cause serious physical and mental health complications. If the doctor believes that your child is acutely unwell, such as if they have a low heart rate or there is a big jump in their blood pressure when they move from sitting to standing, or if there is an abnormality on their ECG, the GP may advise that you attend a hospital emergency department immediately.

If they consider your child or teenager is able to remain at home they will refer you to one or more of the following services

- A specialist eating disorders service such as the Eating Disorders Youth Service (PEDYS) at the Royal Hobart Hospital;
- A private mental health clinician trained in the provision of Family Based Therapy or another evidence-based treatment;
- A private dietitian with experience in caring for children and/or teenagers with eating disorders; and/or
- The Tasmanian Health Service's Child and Youth Mental Health Service (CYMHS)

Your GP should also set up regular appointments for monitoring your child or teen's medical mental health.

They may also consider a referral for a Psychiatric assessment.



## Resources

**National Eating Disorders Collaboration (NEDC):** [www.nedc.com.au](http://www.nedc.com.au)

**Butterfly Foundation Helpline:** 1800 33 4673

**Eating Disorders Families Australia:** [www.edfa.org.au](http://www.edfa.org.au)



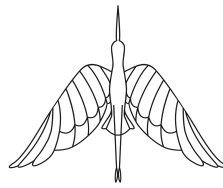
## Get in Touch!

At Balanced: Mind Body Life we have clinicians with experience in the treatment of eating disorders in children and teenagers. If you are concerned about your child or teenager and would like to book an assessment and/or ongoing treatment, you can reach out to us. Medicare rebates apply if you have a referral from your GP.

Phone: 0475 000 679

Email: [admin@balancedtas.com](mailto:admin@balancedtas.com)

You can also fill out our contact form at [www.tasmindbodylife.com](http://www.tasmindbodylife.com)



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